



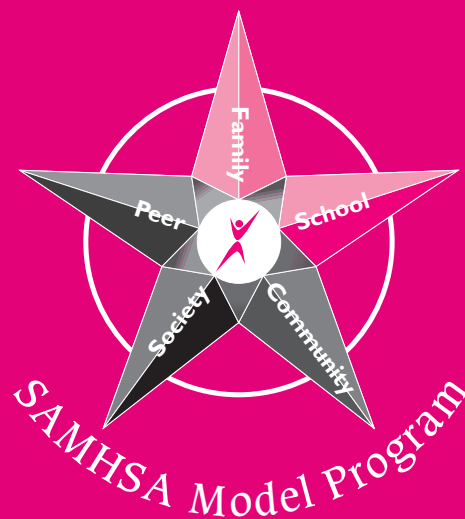
Also available
in Spanish

Children In The Middle: Divorce Education for Parents

Children In The Middle is a skills-based program that helps children and parents deal with the children's reactions to divorce. Divorcing parents may use their children to manipulate and/or control each other around a variety of personal, social, and financial issues. These tactics increase the stress and anxiety typically experienced by children of divorce and can increase children's risk for behavior problems, depression, delinquency, substance use, teen pregnancy, school failure and dropout, and suicide. Built around a 37-minute video for parents and a 30-minute video for children, Children In The Middle needs no special training or licensing to implement, and seeks to alleviate children's problems such as—

- Loss of concentration and attention
- Declining grades and behavior problems at school
- Withdrawal from friends
- Emotional outbursts and health problems
- Serious anger with one or both parents
- Delinquency and substance use

The parent video teaches parents the skills needed to avoid putting children in the middle of their conflicts. The child video helps children understand why parents divorce. It dispels common myths that children have about divorce (e.g., "It's my fault" or "I can get my parents back together") and teaches children stress and anger management and problem-solving skills. The parent video is available open-captioned or in Spanish.



*Effective Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Programs
for Every Community*

PROVEN RESULTS*

- 57% reduction in litigation (e.g., child-access, change of custody, and/or child-support disputes)
- 30% to 53% reduction in parental conflict, particularly loyalty conflicts
- 70% fewer school absences
- 54% fewer physician visits by children
- 22% reduction in child-reported stress

** Compared to control group. Results statistically significant.*

INTERVENTION

Universal

Selective

Indicated



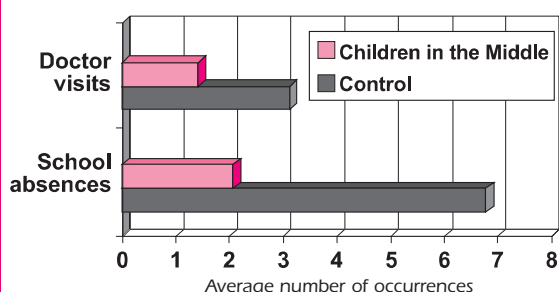
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

Outcomes

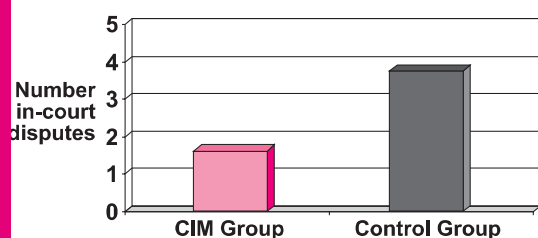
After completing the Children In The Middle program, parents became less angry toward their ex-spouses and dramatically reduced their children's exposure to their conflict. Parental mastery of program skills and reduction of divorce-related behaviors in the children were related to the level of divorce-related relitigation. Compared to divorce education programs that were either based on providing information or informing parents about children's feelings about divorce (affect-based), the skills-based Children In The Middle program—

- Decreased children's exposure to parental conflict
- Decreased stress children experienced
- Increased parental communication skills

Difference in conflict-related behaviors used to measure program effectiveness, Children In The Middle families compared to control group families at 6-month outcome evaluation



30-month relitigation frequency: Children In The Middle and control groups



INTENDED POPULATION

The program was designed for children 3 to 15 years of age who are subjected to adult conflicts during a divorce and their parents. During divorce, children experience loyalty conflicts when they are asked to, manipulated into, or believe that they need to side with a parent. Children In The Middle seeks to change and/or limit the impact of the parents' behaviors. The program has been evaluated with more than 1,000 African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and White families representing a cross-section of incomes in small towns and large cities. These studies were conducted in court settings, schools, community agencies, and therapists' offices.

BENEFITS

- Increased parental support of the children's relationship with the other parent
- Custodial parent increases children's time with the other parent
- Parents learn how loyalty conflicts affect their children
- Children learn to use "I messages" to tell their parents when they feel caught in a loyalty bind
- Increased direct communication between parents instead of using the children as messengers
- Parents learn communication skills such as "I messages"

HOW IT WORKS

Parents are usually mandated to attend classes held in their communities (at social service agencies, community colleges) by domestic relations courts. A group leader facilitates the adult portion of the program, which is typically delivered to a class of 12 to 20 parents. The first session includes the 37-minute "Children In The Middle" video. Narrated by a dynamic husband-and-wife team, the video features realistic scenes portrayed by actual families of divorce showing inappropriate and appropriate methods of handling conflict. The tape is stopped at cued discussion points to allow parents to respond to questions about how children feel when caught in loyalty binds and what they can do to resolve the conflict. Workbook exercises and role-plays give parents a chance to practice new skills. If the class meets more than once, homework is assigned from the workbook. One or two 90- to 120-minute class sessions are typical.

Children's programs may be held at school, with a mental health practitioner, or in groups at social service agencies. Parents and children can view the 30-minute child-focused video together and complete workbook exercises at home or at the practitioner's office with guidance from the practitioner. Typically, a family counselor will incorporate the materials into a treatment plan consisting of 4 to 10 sessions over 2 to 4 months. Parents are given the *What About the Children* booklet and the *Parents and Children's Guidebook* to study and complete exercises at home.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Parental recruitment may be voluntary or by referral from respected sources; however, greatest participation is assured when a domestic relations judge or other official source mandates it. Classes should be held in a safe location (i.e., populated, well-lit public or private facilities, secure rooms, on-premise security services), especially when domestic violence is possible. Classes should be offered regularly and at various times, depending on community size and divorce rate, to assure prompt participation. Needed equipment includes a VCR and monitor, either a flip chart or chalkboard, and an overhead projector or other equipment to display a PowerPoint presentation.

Training

This is a stand-alone program and training is not required for group leaders. However, effective group leaders must have experience with divorced families, have good interpersonal skills, and be nonjudgmental. They must study the *Discussion Leader's Guide* and review all program materials.

Program Materials

The complete kit for providing Children In The Middle's group-based parenting education program includes a *Discussion Leader's Guide*, the "Children in the Middle" video, a set of PowerPoint slides, and two booklets. Every parent attending the class receives each of the two booklets: *Children In The Middle: A Parent's and Children's Guidebook*, which provides skill practice, and *What About the Children: A Guide for Divorced and Divorcing Parents*, a 40-page summary of the effects of divorce on children, the impact of moderating variables, and practical advice on ways to increase their children's protective factors and reduce risk factors.

Children's component materials include the video "Children In The Middle: Children's Version," a *Teacher's and Counselor's Manual* to guide practitioners in the use of the program in groups, and *Surviving Divorce: A Student's Companion*, a handbook with thinking and writing exercises for children aged 9 to 15.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Divorce affects more than 1.5 million children a year. The most damaging aspect of divorce for children is their parents' conflict, particularly when it involves loyalty conflicts. Children In The Middle was developed to reduce children's risk for post-divorce maladjustment by reducing the loyalty conflicts experienced by the children.

The program was based on research that identified the most common and stressful loyalty conflicts experienced by children in divorcing relationships, conflicts of which the parents were unaware. The program's adult component video re-creates these conflict scenarios. The philosophy of the approach is that making parents aware that they place their children in loyalty binds and

HERE'S PROOF PREVENTION WORKS

teaching them how to reduce their children's distress will result in changed parental behavior. The Center for Divorce Education, which publishes and distributes the program, was formed to educate judges about the need for such programs for divorcing parents.

EVALUATION DESIGN

Eight evaluations of the program or its components have been conducted. Three studies used random assignment of participants to treatment and control or alternate treatment groups. These studies were conducted in court settings, schools, community agencies, and therapists' offices in small towns and large cities. More than 1,000 families were involved in these evaluations, representing a cross-section of incomes and all major ethnic groups. Details on the studies are available on the Web site: www.divorce-education.com.

PROGRAM DEVELOPERS

Donald Gordon, Ph.D.

Jack Arbuthnot, Ph.D.

Dr. Donald Gordon is a child clinical psychologist and family therapist, and emeritus professor of psychology at Ohio University. Dr. Gordon has developed Model and Promising programs for delinquency and substance abuse prevention (*Parenting Wisely* CD-ROM program and Home-based Behavioral Systems Family Therapy). His 30 years of clinical practice, consulting with schools and juvenile and domestic relations courts, as well as his courtroom and legislative testimony, have informed the programs he developed.

Dr. Jack Arbuthnot is a developmental and social psychologist, a divorce mediator, and also is emeritus professor of psychology at Ohio University. He has consulted with juvenile and domestic relations courts, testified in State legislatures, and provided training, along with Dr. Gordon, for domestic relations judges.

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RECOGNITION

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration, U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services

Positive Parenting Award—Children's Rights
Council